

Delta History News

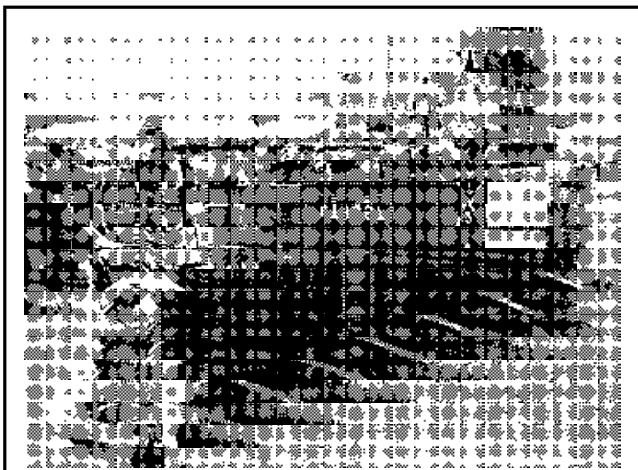
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Delta Marsh History Initiative

In its heyday, Delta Marsh attracted people from all over the world and from all walks of life. Generations of farmers, fishermen, hunters and trappers who lived close to the marsh found themselves in the company of the British royal family, and later, movie stars, television personalities and even astronauts. Today the marsh is just as famous but it has seriously deteriorated since the 1960s due to the effects of unfavourable water levels, a destructive fish species, overgrowth by cattails, and contamination from sewage, agricultural fertilizers and pesticides.

Delta Marsh is designated officially as a Wetland of International Significance, a Heritage Marsh, and an Important Bird Area. As such, many people and organizations are keenly interested in restoring the marsh to its former magnificence. By making people aware of the rich history and cultural importance of the area, we believe that support for conservation of Delta Marsh, and other similarly degraded wetlands throughout the province, will grow. The Delta Marsh story, as part of the heritage of all Manitobans, must be preserved for the benefit of future generations.

A group of people who share an interest in the area, the Delta Marsh History Initiative, is preparing to write a book. This book will include histories of the prominent people and organizations of the marsh, encompassing a full range of views from cottage and lodge owners, hunters, fishers, trappers, birdwatchers, beach-goers, scientists, tourists, and others.



World War II troop carrier on display at the 2000 Winnipeg Air Show. In 1999, two identical carriers were excavated from Delta Beach by Mallard Lodge and are being restored by members of Prairie Command Military Vehicle Association, a non-profit group of antique military hardware enthusiasts.

Steamboats in Delta Marsh

Think of steamboats and you conjure up images of Mark Twain and the Mississippi River. It is less well known that steamboats were a major means of transportation on Manitoba rivers and lakes in the days before the coming of the railroad and the provincial road network. An even more obscure fact is that there are at least two connections between steamboat operations and Delta Marsh.

Around 1874, the merchants Chisholm and Beaubien built a steamboat hull, the *Saskatchewan*, at the thriving port town of Totogan (now long abandoned) on the Whitemud River near the extreme west side of the marsh. Lacking a steam engine, they rigged it with a sail to make several cargo-carrying trips on Lake Manitoba. As historian Robert Hill notes in his 1890 book *The Story of Manitoba*: "On her last return trip a storm blew her out of her course and beached her in a reedy marsh about a mile from the lake, a few miles east of her native port. Her owners, after unavailing efforts to get her afloat, were compelled to abandon her. On the occasion of a prairie fire sweeping through this section of country she caught fire, and was completely destroyed." Although the location is unclear, "a few miles east" of the Whitemud mouth places the shipwreck squarely in Delta Marsh, likely in the lands owned by the Lakewood Country Club and the Portage Country Club.

In the early 1880s, water levels on Lake Manitoba were unusually high, causing widespread flooding of the surrounding land. One upside of the flooding was that waterways that would have been too shallow to navigate were accessible by shallow draught vessels such as steamboats. In September 1881, the small steamboat *Mary Ann Roe* traveled northward in "Cramp Creek" to Lake Manitoba where its crew loaded a cargo of fish oil (probably obtained from the active fishery on the lake at that time) and returned successfully to Portage la Prairie. Today, Cramp Creek—presumably a truncation of the original name—flows into Lake Manitoba two miles west of the Portage Diversion. An even more intriguing possibility arises from the fact that the creek channel peters out a short distance south of the marsh. However, a much larger channel immediately east of it can be seen on aerial photos to span most of the distance to the Assiniboine River near Portage. Now called either "Blind Channel" or "Fort La Reine Snye," this channel more closely resembles the "Cramp Creek" marked on maps of that era. It seems possible that the name "Cramp Creek" was, over the course of time, transferred from the channel used in the early 1880s to float the *Mary Ann Roe* to a smaller creek to the west.

You can help!

- provide photographs, reminiscences, family stories, or any other information pertaining to Delta Marsh
- let us know about people you know who have information about Delta Marsh
- contribute your time to help collect and organize information, contact people, and prepare the book
- make a tax-deductible donation to help with costs of the project

Delta Marsh History Initiative

% Delta Marsh Field Station (University of Manitoba)
 Box 38, R.R. #2
 Portage la Prairie, Manitoba R1N 3A2
 (204) 857-8637 fax: (204) 857-4683
 Toll-free in Manitoba: (800) 432-1960 ext. 7469
 e-mail: delta_marsh@umanitoba.ca

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|--|----------|
| Barry Bills, <i>Portage</i> | 857-3020 |
| Maurice Blanchard, <i>Portage</i> | 857-3807 |
| Shirley Christianson, <i>Portage</i> | 239-6903 |
| Heidi den Haan, <i>Delta</i> | 239-4287 |
| Denzil Gamble, <i>Westbourne</i> | 274-2457 |
| Gary Garrioch, <i>Winnipeg</i> | 339-6929 |
| Gordon Goldsborough, <i>Winnipeg</i> | 474-7469 |
| Bob Jones, <i>Portage</i> | 239-1803 |
| Shirley Love, <i>Oakland</i> | 857-8120 |
| Winnie Pauch, <i>Portage</i> | 857-7498 |
| Glen Suggett, <i>Delta</i> | 945-7763 |
| Don Wilkinson, <i>Delta</i> | 239-6315 |

A day at Delta - 1901

In July 1901, the weekly newspaper *The News and Portage la Prairie Review* ran a colorful story about a trip to Delta, excerpts of which follow:

“The Dominion Day excursion which was run from Winnipeg to Delta and intermediate points yesterday under the auspices of Court Marquette, Independent Order of Foresters was a grand success in every sense of the word.

About half past nine in the morning the crowd commenced congregating at the Canadian Northern depot and a rapid sale of tickets then commenced. By the time the train was due to arrive it was easily to be seen that no train could accommodate such a huge mass of jolly excursionists. The three cars which were in the yards here had long been filled to overflowing, and still there were from eight hundred to a thousand Portagers waiting for car room.

The first train pulled out from the station here at 11.30 and although the seats, the isles and car and platforms were crowded full over the half the crowd was left on the platform here. A large number of daring youths had taken up their abode on the tops of the cars and on the engine tender, and in fact any place they could hang on, but still hundreds were left behind. The run was made to the lake in about an hour without an accident; beyond

the loss of numerous hats, an occasional lunch basket and other sundry articles.

As soon as the cars were empty the train immediately ran back to Portage to bring out those who were left. On arriving here the second train was soon almost as heavily loaded as the first, but fortunately on this occasion all could get accommodations of some time. The second train arrived at Delta about 2 o'clock.

After arriving at the beach the first order of business was to attend to the requirements of the “inner man” who by this time was beginning to make his presence felt. After dinner boating was generally indulged in, the steamer *Petrel* which had been chartered for the occasion by the Foresters, proved to be a popular boat and made three excursions.

The boat left the dock at three o'clock and had on board about two hundred and fifty passengers including the local Salvation Army band, which by the way went a long way towards making the excursion a success. The *Petrel* proceeded about four miles out into the lake and returned, arriving at the dock shortly after four. On the second trip the boat pulled out about half past four and this trip was practically a repetition of the first. Still another trip was made by the boat, and on this occasion the excursion committee who had worked hard all day to make things pleasant for the picnickers went on board on a special invitation of the Captain and Mr. Spiers, the manager.

Those who did not patronize the *Petrel* used the sail and row boats while others bathed in the refreshing waters of our beautiful lake. Still there were others who spent their time in games, social conversation and visited friends who were in camp there. And when it was time to return, all were highly pleased with days outing.

As a result of yesterday's excursion a large influx of campers at Delta may be expected, owing to the fact that but few people previously had any idea of the attractions which Delta afforded campers. The grounds although not yet in the best of condition, are being rapidly put into shape and when this work is completed should make one of the most popular summer resorts in the province.”

Delta History Fish Fry

Come enjoy all-you-can-eat pickerel and find out more about Delta Marsh history!

Saturday, 2 March 2002

Herman Prior Centre
 40 Royal Road North, Portage la Prairie
Come anytime between 11 am and 2 pm

Tickets (\$10 for adults, \$5 for kids 6-12, kids under 6 free) are available at the door, or in advance from the Delta Marsh History Initiative.

All proceeds help to support the work of the Delta Marsh History Initiative.